



SUCCESS STORY

Iraqis Gain Improved Access to Courts

Kirkuk expands legal services to help residents assert individual rights



USAID Project Staff

Representatives of the Kirkuk Jurists Union (KJU) prepare information materials for distribution to raise awareness of legal rights. The KJU has been successful in finding ways to make the justice system accessible to poor people who can't afford to hire lawyers to represent them.

November 9, 2008— Led by prominent Iraqi lawyers, the Kirkuk Jurists Union (KJU) has improved access to courts and provided legal protection to Kirkuk's disadvantaged residents, enabling them to assert their individual rights.

The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and Kirkuk Provincial Reconstruction Team—groups of civilians that work with military units on reconstruction projects—helped the KJU open a branch office in Kirkuk, which serves more than one million Arab, Kurd, Turkmen and Chaldo-Assyrian residents.

USAID's Iraq Rapid Assistance Program (IRAP) awarded over \$108,000 in grants for the KJU to raise awareness of legal rights through public workshops, individual consultations, and public distribution of handbooks and other legal resources.

Within three months of opening the new branch office, the KJU provided advice to more than 90 residents and successfully argued more than 20 cases in court. More than 180 people, including a dozen law students from the local university, attended the first three public workshops. As a result, 57 students are waiting to be enrolled in future workshops.

The KJU publishes and distributes valuable materials to key offices, institutions, and individuals throughout Kirkuk. Included in these publications are a monthly newspaper, which reports on court news and statistics; a pamphlet, which explains the court codes and procedures; and a law handbook.

According to Jeffrey Ashley, USAID representative in Kirkuk, "By helping Kirkuk residents have a better understanding of the court and legal system, the KJU is helping make peaceful co-existence a sustainable reality."

Since 2003, USAID has spent more than \$6 billion on programs designed to stabilize communities; foster economic and agricultural growth; and build the capacity of the national, local, and provincial governments to respond to the needs of Iraqis.

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